

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 SP-02 SSC-01 /033 W
-----074459 011347Z /53
P 282330Z FEB 78
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1262
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0063

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE ANNOUNCES NON-SHUFFLE

1. NEWS OF MINISTER LEVESQUE'S LONG-ANTICIPATED CABINET SHUFFLE WAS MORE A WHIMPER THAN A BANG TODAY; LEVESQUE ANNOUNCED ONLY ONE RELATIVELY MINOR CABINET CHANGE. DENIS VAUGEOIS, FROM TROIS-RIVIERES, WILL TAKE OVER THE MINISTRY OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS FROM LOUIS O'NEILL, WHO WILL RETAIN THE MINISTRY FOR COMMUNICATIONS. O'NEILL HAD PREVIOUSLY HELD BOTH POSTS CONCURRENTLY. VAUGEOIS, WHO WAS FIRST ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN THE PQ LANDSLIDE OF 1976, HAS BEEN SERVING AS PARLIAMENTARY ASSISTANT TO INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN.

2. COMMENTC DESPITE HIS NAME, OR PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF IT, O'NEILL IS ONE OF CABINET'S MOST RIGID QUEBEC NATIONALISTS. HIS HEAVY-HANDED EFFORTS USE HIS OFFICE AS PULPIT TO PREACH NARROW NATIONALIST AND PROGRESSIVE GOSPEL HAVE OFFENDED MANY AMONG HEAVILY PRO-PEQUISTE CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC ELITE. HIS LOSS OF MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SENSITIVE CULTURAL DOMAIN COMES AS NO SURPRISE. WHAT IS SURPRISING, HOWEVER, IS THAT SHUFFLE WAS NOT MORE EXTENSIVE. MOST OBSERVERS TOOK IT AS VIRTUAL CERTAINTY THAT LISE PAYETTE WOULD LOSE AT LEAST
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ONE OF HER PORTFOLIOS, ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE ABSENTED HERSELF FROM OPENING OF NATIOAN ASSEMBLY. (SEE QUEBEC 54)
STRONG HINTS HAVE BEEN EMANATING FROM PM'S OFFICE FOR SOME TIME THAT HOT-HEADED ROBERT BURNS MIGHT LOSE POST AS PQ PARLIAMENTARY LEADER. MORE RECENTLY, THERE HAS BEEN MUCH INSPIRED SPECULATION THAT FINANCE MINISTER PARIZEAU WOULD GIVE UP HIS CONCURRENT PORTFOLIO OF MINISTER OF REVENUE. AS IT TURNS OUT, FOR A

VARIETY OF POSSIBLE REASONS, LEVESQUE WAS UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO
MAKE MAJOR CHANGES IN HIS GOVERNMENT. PART OF PROBLEM NO
DOUBT IS LEVESQUE'S OWN SENTIMENTAL RELUCTANCE OFFEND OLD
FRIENDS AND LOYAL SUPPORTERS. HOWEVER, I DOUBT THIS HAD MUCH
TO DO WITH HIS FAILURE TO MOVE AGAINST PAYETTE AND BURNS.
NEITHER HAVE EVER BEEN CLOSE TO LEVESQUE AND BURNS WAS ACTUALLY
AUTHOR OF ATTEMPT DUMP LEVESQUE AS LEADER OF PQ IN EARLY 70'S.
INTERNAL STRUGGLES WITHIN CABINET AND PARTY ARE MORE LIKLY
EXPLANATION. WHATEVER STAYED PREMIER'S HAND, HE IS BOUND TO LOSE
SOME FACE AS MANY INTERPRETS HIS FAILURE MOVE AGAINST DEFIANT
PAYETTE AS SIGN OF WEAKNESS. MCNAMARA

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, PERSONNEL MOVEMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUEBEC00063
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780093-0936
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978023/aaaaacff.tel
Line Count: 73
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c5b4b7d2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3526809
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEVESQUE ANNOUNCES NON-SHUFFLE
TAGS: PINT, CA, (LEVESQUE, RENE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c5b4b7d2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014